

# Lies Of Our Times

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Colonialism Triumphs in Panama

Reuters/Bettmann

**Chomsky  
Shreds the  
Sunday Times**

**Panama, the  
Media, and  
Black Folks**

**Times Watch:  
Kinzer and  
Gruson  
Dissected**

**The Homeless  
and the Media**

## Letter from Graham Greene:

*"I fully share your feelings about the cowardly invasion of Panama . . ."*



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### RECOMMENDED VIEWING:

On March 29 Deep Dish TV, the nation's first public access television network, presents highlights from the Institute for Media Analysis's conference, "Anticommunism and the U.S.: History and Consequences," held at Harvard in November 1988. "Ends and Means," produced by Catherine Sealfeld and Dee Dee Halleck, is a half-hour show featuring interviews with some of the 150 speakers and 1,500 participants at the historic conference, which examined the U.S. obsession with communism. (Tapes and transcripts are available from IMA.) Another half-hour show in the same program investigates TV Martí, the USIA broadcast aimed at destabilizing Cuba.

For a listing of 20 other Deep Dish programs—continuing through May 1990—and information on how to have your local public access station obtain them, call Deep Dish TV at (212) 473-8933.

## Lies Of Our Times

A Journal to Correct the Record

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## To Our Readers

*Lies Of Our Times* is a magazine of media criticism. "Our Times" are the times we live in but also the words of the *New York Times*, the most cited news medium in the U.S., our paper of record. Our "Lies" are more than literal falsehoods; they encompass subjects that have been ignored, hypocrisies, misleading emphases, and hidden premises—the biases which systematically shape reporting. We can address only a sampling of the universe of media lies and distortions. But, over time, we hope *Lies Of Our Times* will go a long way toward correcting the record.

## Noam Chomsky

### Letter from Lexington

*Editors' Note: Noam Chomsky teaches at MIT and lives in Lexington, Massachusetts, where the first American Revolution began. Periodically, he sends us his thoughts on many issues relevant to readers of LOOT. When he does, we will present this column, Letter from Lexington.*

Lexington, February 11, 1990

I guess a sign of my improving health is that the *Times* infuriates me as much as it always did (over the summer, when I was ill, it only made me laugh). So take today (Sunday, February 11, 1990). I'm enclosing three items that might be of interest to *LOOT*—though they involve not so much lies, literally, as cowardice and dishonesty.

The article on Timor ["East Timor Bishop Writes of Torture" (page 23)], carefully excludes the role of the U.S. government and its Newspaper of Record, although both played an important role in what the author euphemistically calls the "forced annexation." Furthermore, there's not a phrase on the character of that "annexation." By contrast, no article on the Khmer Rouge appears without some phrase like "who killed millions of Cambodians," just to make sure that you know who we're talking about.

The article by Steven Erlanger ["Southeast Asia Is Now No. 1 Source of U.S. Heroin" (page 26)], carefully excludes two things. First, while Erlanger mentions that for the past 25 years the U.S. has been struggling to deal with the drug flow from Southeast Asia, he doesn't add the minor point that the problem arose because the CIA entered the game at that time to organize and amplify the relatively small drug racket (which itself was largely due to U.S.-supported Kuomintang gangsters in Burma). So having created the monster as part of the "clandestine war" in Laos, the U.S. has been struggling to try to tame its creation—all unmentioned. (Also unmentioned in the same connection is that Afghanistan's similar problem has similar causes.)

The second interesting omission has to do with Thailand. Erlanger describes how U.S. diplomats are trying to get across to the Thais the error of their ways, in failing to cope with drugs. The diplomats don't, of course, accuse Thailand of actively exporting drugs and using various devices to ram them down the throats of American consumers, putting the screws on Washington so that it can't act to stop the flow, spending massive amounts of money in the U.S. media to encourage drug use, etc. But that is exactly what we are doing in Thailand with tobacco—a drug that is more dangerous by known measures than heroin (by a substantial margin). In the midst of the government-media furor about the "drug war" in September, a United States Trade Representative meeting considered a tobacco company demand that we impose trade sanctions on Thailand because they are trying to regulate tobacco, cutting down imports and limiting advertising. (We had already forced Japan and South Korea to import our narcotics by the same measures.) Former Surgeon General Koop and others testified that this was a replay of the

Opium Wars, an indescribable scandal, etc. Nothing of the sort troubles the *Times* or the earnest diplomats it quotes today.

The Mark Uhlig article on Nicaraguan elections ["For the Sandinista Faithful, An Item to Fit Every Mood" (page 28)], is, typically, derisive about the infamous Sandinistas who are handing out T-shirts to influence voters and in other ways acting like totalitarian maniacs. This is standard reporting these days.

On page 30 there is an article about how Lyndon Johnson stole the senatorial elections in Texas. I looked at the recent *New Yorker* articles on LBJ's career. The facts reveal that Johnson's triumph makes the Sandinistas look like idealized Jeffersonians. Apparently, no one has any cognitive dissonance; I suspect that if one raised the matter, the answer would be that the LBJ fraud was a long time ago, only 170 years after the American Revolution, so it is unfair to bring it up—we hadn't quite got our act together.

Anyway, I had to get some anger out before getting to work.

Best,  
Noam

### Letter From Graham Greene

*Editors' Note: We were pleased to receive the following letter from the novelist Graham Greene, in response to Ellen Ray's "Noriega, Torrijos, and the CIA," in the February LOOT.*

Antibes, February 6, 1990

I fully share your feelings about the cowardly invasion of Panama. How will the former head of the CIA, President Bush, now deal with the problem of Noriega and the secrets he knows? He has to be silenced. A proper trial is out of the question. It is laughable to include among the charges the secret import of marijuana into the States when the whole world knows that the biggest grower of marijuana on the American Continent is the States.

Shot while attempting to escape? A little too obvious.

What I foresee is a great show of American justice: a decision that it is for Panama to judge him and not the United States. Let him be handed over to his fellow countrymen now ruled by an American nominee and where the death penalty cannot be ruled out.

You rightly draw attention to the doubts surrounding the "accident" in which Omar Torrijos, a man I knew well and loved, lost his life. One fact is not generally known. According to custom the Canadian builders of his plane sent their insurance company down to Panama to investigate. What was very unusual, the inspectors returned without visiting the scene of the "accident" as they were assured by certain high officers of the National Guard, who included Noriega then connected with the CIA, that the destruction of the plane had been so complete that there was nothing useful to be seen there.

Yours etc,  
Graham Greene

# Panama, the Media, and Black Folks

Clinton Cox

**T**he great American myth makers in the media are at it again and the public, as usual, loves their lies. George "John Wayne" Bush has gone charging into someone else's country, flags flying and six-shooters a-blazing, to defend white folks' economic and political interests.

In the days following the invasion I waited anxiously for reporters and commentators to seriously question the legality and morality of this government's actions. But television, especially, seemed filled with people who apparently had never had their jingoistic Americanism disturbed by unpleasant facts.

Almost to a man — and woman — they identified with George Bush's flag-waving defense of the use of massive violence. They defended both the invasion and their largely unquestioning reporting of the Bush administration's line by repeatedly proclaiming that 92 percent of the Panamanians polled backed the invasion.

First of all, I'd like to know the racial and class makeup of the people who were polled, for Panama is a country where race pretty much determines class and what rung in society you're able to occupy.

Secondly, what do polls have to do with honest reporting?

If the polls had shown the majority of Panamanians disapproving the invasion, would the high-priced television reporters and commentators have questioned the legality and morality of it? Would they have shown at least a minimal concern for the innocent Panamanian men, women, and children who were killed by the massive use of U.S. firepower in crowded slums filled with the poorer (darker) Panamanians?

Phil Donahue hosted a panel discussion with several of these superstars, including Brit Hume of ABC and Lesley Stahl of CBS. Every time he raised the question of civilian casualties, they parroted the administration line that the casualties were relatively low, and, besides, all they could do was report what the administration told them.

Stahl seemed especially indignant at being asked to do more reporting on the civilians.

Not one of them, apparently, could conceive of going into those slums and talking to the people whose lives had been disrupted, whose homes had been destroyed, and whose loved ones had been killed by the U.S. military.

"The poll shows the majority of Panamanians support us," they said, as if they were all soldiers under Bush's command. Only Helen Thomas of UPI seemed to care about the legality of the invasion and the killing and suffering of the civilians. The rest reported on Panama like they report on Harlem or Bedford-Stuyvesant or the South Bronx. Or like they reported on

This article is excerpted from the January 17, 1990, issue of *The City Sun*, a metropolitan Black weekly based in Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Cox is a staff writer there.

the Charles Stuart murder case in Boston with all the violations of Black rights during the police search: from the point of view of white Americans with a powerful stake in justifying a racial order controlled by whites for the benefit of whites.

Race-based social systems have been nurtured by the United States for almost a century in Latin America, beginning with the occupation of Cuba during the Spanish-American War in 1898.

The vast majority of the white media in this country have always gone along with this government's anti-Black and anti-poor-people policies in other countries, usually by being silent about them, just as they are now going along with the government's attempts to dehumanize the Panamanian civilian casualties by enclosing them within a wall of silence.

Panama's racial history is as complex and devoid of sanity as that of the United States and, to a significant extent, has been shaped by the United States.

The American government brought in thousands of West Indians to do the most backbreaking work involved in building the canal. White American Southerners were put in charge of the Black workers because of the Southerners' experience in exploiting Black people. Soon "White" and "Colored" signs appeared at rigidly segregated toilets, water fountains, and other public services. A 1962 visitor to the Panama operations of the United Fruit Company said they resembled slave plantations in the antebellum South.

With the support of the United States, the small white oligarchy gained economic and political control.

Arnulfo Arias Madrid, three times elected president of Panama and a reputed admirer of Hitler, promulgated several racial laws, including one expelling all West Indians. His racial policies were never opposed by his American sponsors.

Race inevitably will be a significant and volatile component of any solution this country decides on for Panama, either implicitly or explicitly, though one would know nothing of its importance from listening to George Bush or his media parrots.

When can we expect them to begin to honestly present that reality and the humanity it represents? About the same time we can expect them to start presenting Black Americans as human beings. About the same time they start using as much eagerness and emotion in reporting about police brutality against Black men, women, and children as they use in reporting the alleged crimes of Black men against white women. About the same time they quit trying to protect white privilege in this country through the power of their myth-making institutions.

In other words, folks, no time soon.

Wide World Photos



U.S. soldiers searching Panamanians.



## Not Fit To Print

# Editing Out Salvadoran Torture

**C**ompare the headlines that appeared above the same news item on January 8 in two U.S. newspapers: "U.S. Woman Tells of Salvadoran Ordeal" and "Casolo Says She Heard Sounds of Torture." The first comes from the *New York Times*, which habitually obfuscates when tackling such delicate subjects as U.S.-sponsored torture; the second, from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, published sufficiently far from Washington, D.C. so as not to disturb those who guarantee the slaughter in El Salvador.

The story, written by *Times* reporter Jason DeParle and picked off the *New York Times News Service* recounts a talk given by Jennifer Casolo in Manhattan. Casolo, who was charged with securing a cache of FMLN arms in her backyard, spent 18 days imprisoned in El Salvador.

Here is what DeParle wrote in his final four paragraphs:

"Casolo said that on November 30, the night of her third interrogation, she was placed in a 6 foot square room with shag carpet and 'fuzzy' walls to muffle sounds. From adjacent rooms, she said, 'I heard cries.'

" 'I heard flesh hitting flesh, flesh hitting furniture,' she said. 'I heard screams—muffled, of course. I heard choking. I heard vomiting.' Casolo said she was not harmed because she was a U.S. citizen.

"About an hour into her interrogation, she said, 'the screams and cries from the booth next door became unbearable.' As the tears rolled down her face, she said, her interrogators taunted her saying: 'Oh, so you're crying for your terrorist friends.'

"Casolo said she told her captors: 'I would shed the same tears for you and you and you.'

The *Times* excised this unsettling account; the *Post Intelligencer* highlighted it. And this was not the only difference in approach. Consider the following progression of DeParle's article from wire service to print:

Here is what the *New York Times News Service* transmitted: "The arrest of Ms. Casolo took on international significance. The United States provides about \$1.4 million a day in aid to the Salvadoran government. Her arrest came during a major rebel offensive in the Salvadoran capital."

Here is what the *New York Times* published: "Her arrest came during a major rebel offensive in the Salvadoran capital."

And this is what the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote: "Her arrest, which came during a major rebel offensive in El Salvador and a crackdown on church workers, took on international significance. The United States provides about \$1.4 million a day in aid to the Salvadoran government, which often looks upon

church workers as rebel sympathizers."

John Brewer, executive editor of the *Times News Service*, told me that the content of DeParle's piece "should be what went in the *Times*." When I pointed out the difference between the two articles, he claimed that DeParle's final four paragraphs must have been "taken out for space." Of the other example, what bothered him, he said, was that "the *Post-Intelligencer* changed those words"—i.e., adding the references to church workers. Actually, if the *Post-Intelligencer* can be faulted, it is for understatement: Murder becomes "a crackdown"; a government that actively "kills" becomes one that passively "looks"; a powerful FMLN "defensive" against social, economic and political violence is portrayed blandly as a "major rebel offensive."

The *Times* did leave intact DeParle's summary of the administration's response to Casolo's arrest:

"The Bush administration reacted quickly and skeptically to Ms. Casolo's statement that she was innocent. The White House spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said: 'There are indications of her involvement. That's for certain.'"

However, an additional sentence was removed: "His remarks drew fire from many politicians and rights groups, who called his comments insensitive."

## The *Times* obstructs the efforts of its own reporters to cover a story accurately, tailoring the article to fit administration preconceptions.

The editorial surgery performed upon DeParle's report clearly indicates how the *Times* obstructs the efforts of their own reporters to cover a story accurately, tailoring the article to fit preconceptions that usually conform to those of the U.S. administration.

The day after DeParle's truncated story appeared, a *Times* editorial called Cristiani's announcement that "some elements of the armed forces" were responsible for killing the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, "a moral and political landmark." Under the title "Brave Stand for Justice in El Salvador," it stated that "In praising Mr. Cristiani's courage, the Bush Administration speaks for most Americans." This is nonsense, as demonstrated by recent protests against the U.S. war in El Salvador—the most impressive antiwar mobilization since the Vietnam era. In an unsigned editorial on the same day the *Post-Intelligencer*, the more conservative of Seattle's two dailies, exhibited a clearer understanding of the political topography in El Salvador:

"President Alfredo Cristiani now confirms what has appeared evident for nearly two months.... [El Salvador's] wealthy leadership has long used anti-communism as an excuse to exploit the lower classes. The Jesuits and other Catholics have rightly exposed that massive fraud.... It is obvious that some rightists must be sacrificed because international reaction to the murders has been severely critical.... Some may well be found guilty of the crime. But the real guilty—the rightist leaders—will go free to preach, hypocritically, the goodness of Salvadoran democracy."

Richard McKerrow is a British free-lance journalist.

# Closed Captions?

E. Bruce Berman, Jr.

**T**hose of us who have followed the “progress” (I use the word progress loosely here, the same way “devolution” can be a synonym for “evolution”) of *New York Times* correspondent Stephen Kinzer from his stint as press secretary for Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in the 1970s through his tour of duty as the *Times*’s man in Managua, were delighted by Kinzer’s recent candid comments about the straight press’s role in promoting Reagan-era foreign policy in Nicaragua.

Actually, amazed would be more accurate than delighted.

Kinzer, who should know better, has been criticized for his role in disseminating Reagan administration fabrications and anti-Sandinista propaganda during his years on the scene in Nicaragua.

So it was a bit of a shocker when, in an interview with the *Cape Cod Times* last year (July 13, 1989), Kinzer decried exactly the sort of uncritical journalistic behavior which he himself has engaged in as “one of the exigencies of what is known as objective journalism.”

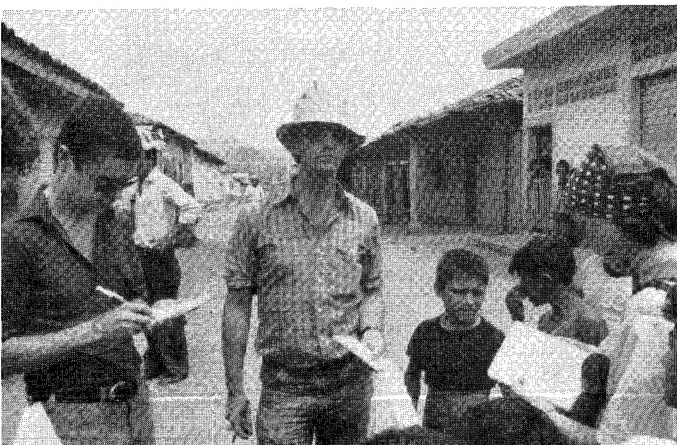
In a burst of unrecognized self-criticism, Kinzer suggested that press coverage might be improved if reporters were encouraged to make independent observations as well as report official statements as if they were gospel.

Kinzer offered the following example: “President Reagan today denounced the Sandinistas for having converted Nicaragua into a ‘totalitarian dungeon’ — another one of his [Reagan’s] wild exaggerations that ignores the abuses of the Guatemalan colonels, Salvadoran death squad leaders, and Argentine torturers, with whom he is so friendly,” Kinzer said.

“You can’t put that in a story. But that is sometimes what is crying out to be said.”

In fairness, the *Times* Central American coverage is not the

Kenneth Silverman



Stephen Kinzer of the *New York Times* (left), Christopher Dickey then of the *Washington Post* (center), and Julia Preston of the *Post* (right), interviewing reliable sources in Nicaragua.

E. Bruce Berman, Jr., is a free-lance writer in Boston.

only segment of U.S. media which could benefit from more of this contextual reportage.

As I watched Peter Jennings report that wages were up 4.3 percent in the U.S. in 1989, and then mention in passing that the cost of living rose 4.7 percent in the same period (for a net decrease in the standard of living of .4 percent, but who’s counting?), I wondered if the fact that the story was illustrated by just one large up arrow on a graph labeled “Wages up 4.7%” might not be just a tad misleading.

Fortunately, there is a Kinzer-inspired technological quick fix, “Closed Captions for the Contextually Impaired,” which might really improve the quality of television network news.

There are still some bugs to be worked out in the system, like just which multinational conglomerate might be willing to underwrite the costs of the contextual captioning in exchange for ideological control, but don’t worry. Do what I do.

Tape a piece of plastic wrap to the bottom of your television screen, and write the following short message to yourself in magic marker:

“...meanwhile, real wages for working people in the U.S. continue to fall. And that’s a part of your world we won’t be talking about this evening.”

Then turn off the set and go see “Roger and Me.” ●

## The Kinzer Record

**W**hen Stephen Kinzer reported on the Guatemala elections of 1984 and 1985, he had every opportunity to address “the abuses of the Guatemalan colonels,” as this was directly relevant to the integrity of these elections. But in his several dozen articles on these elections, he never once discussed the apparatus of pacification in Guatemala, the ongoing killings, the background of army mass murder in the holocaust years 1978-84, and the effects of these on the climate of fear; the ability of dissidents to organize and run candidates; or the freedom of speech and press. In only one article did he mention in passing that the Left was off the ballot, but he never located anybody to reflect on this point or to suggest that this made the elections a farce. He did cite a report on the elections by the International Human Rights Law Group, but only to the effect that the election was “procedurally correct.” Most of the Law Group’s report focused on the substantive defects of the election, and it repeatedly stressed that “the greater part of the population lives in permanent fear,” but Kinzer failed to cite the report on substance — he used it only to verify procedural correctness.

In the case of the 1984 Nicaraguan election, by contrast, Kinzer repeatedly mentioned alleged Sandinista intimidation and threats. The relative stress on Guatemalan and Sandinista violence gave the impression that the Sandinista army posed a greater threat to election integrity than the Guatemalan army, a huge misrepresentation of reality. Kinzer even devoted a full article to claims of Nicaraguan foes of the Sandinistas that Guatemala might serve as an electoral model for Nicaragua, as



a civilian-ruled Guatemala, whereas a man in uniform, Ortega, still ruled Nicaragua ("Guatemala Vote Heartens Nicaragua Parties," December 27, 1985). Kinzer never hinted in this article that army power had not ended in Guatemala.

In 11 of his 14 articles on the Nicaraguan election, Kinzer cited or mentioned Arturo Cruz as the "main opposition," and he used this to trash the election as a "sham." This was, of course, the U.S. government propaganda line on Nicaragua. The U.S. official view on the Guatemalan election was that it was just fine, and legitimizing. The *Times* followed these positions editorially, and Kinzer gave them credence by emphasis and suppression in his news coverage.

Did Kinzer have to suppress the army record in Guatemala and cite the Law Group only on "procedural correctness," not on the climate of fear? Did he have to pretend that Ortega's army uniform and Cerezo's civilian garb showed army control to be greater in Nicaragua than in Guatemala? In these and other cases Kinzer seems to have gone out of his way to push the Reagan and *Times* party line. If it was a false and unfair portrayal, as he intimates in his *Cape Cod Times* interview, his full cooperation in this campaign of disinformation is even more compromising. Stephen Kinzer will be a strong candidate for the annual *Lies Of Our Times* award of M.H. — Master of Hypocrisy.

—Edward S. Herman

## CIA Spin . . .

**W**illiam Hamilton, deputy national editor of the *Washington Post*, once warned a New York University journalism class against the perils of inadvertently succumbing to the government's hidden agendas, and becoming conduits of government spin. In their recent front-page article ("C.I.A. Seeks Looser Rules On Killings During Coups," October 17, 1989), Stephen Engelberg and the *New York Times* succumb to this occupational hazard, serving as spin doctors for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Filed October 16, Engelberg's story began as follows:

"William H. Webster, the Director of Central Intelligence, called today on the President and Congress to consider giving the Central Intelligence Agency greater latitude in supporting potentially violent efforts to overthrow foreign dictators."

The essence of Engelberg's piece: Webster, in his first extensive discussion of the CIA's role in the failed Panama coup attempt of October 3, 1989, was asking the Bush administration and Congress to relax an executive order barring "American assistance to any coup that could lead to the death of a country's leader, even in the heat of battle."

Engelberg's story was based on an interview with Webster (which the Director used as a vehicle to "call on" the government). The only other input to the story came from "Administration officials" and Senator William Cohen, vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, who, Engelberg wrote,

"said Congress and the Administration should ask whether the rules on assassination had handcuffed what should be the Government's most entrepreneurial and risk-taking agency." Nine and a half inches of Engelberg's 30.5-column inch story were given to direct quotes of Webster's statements. Cohen and the "Administration officials" got a total of three inches. All but about four inches of what was left was "Mr. Webster also pointed out..." stuff.

Two days before Engelberg's story appeared, *Los Angeles Times* writer Robin Wright reported a significantly different version of the story. According to Wright:

"Fourteen years after a formal prohibition on U.S. assassinations of foreign officials, the Bush administration is now defining the ban's language to permit clandestine operations even if they threaten the lives of foreign figures" ("Covert Actions Studied—President Plans to Loosen Rules," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 15, 1989, p. 1A).

Wright went on:

"Now, without changing the [executive] order [proscribing assassination], the Bush administration is adding a legal definition of the term *assassination* that applies only to premeditated political murder" (emphasis in original).

### Key Material Ignored

In stark contrast to Engelberg's largely verbatim rendering of Webster's prescriptions for the future of his own agency, Wright's report included key material ignored by Engelberg and the *New York Times*:

- A new "memorandum of Law" drafted by the Pentagon's Office of the Army Judge Advocate General effectively provides new ground rules for assessing CIA covert operations to take out foreign figures. The 15-page document took two years to complete, and was contributed to by the CIA, the State Department, Congress, and other U.S. agencies.

- The Pentagon memorandum states: "A decision by the President to employ overt military force ... would not constitute assassination if U.S. forces were employed against the combatant forces of another nation, a guerrilla force, or a terrorist or other organization whose actions pose a threat to the security of the United States." (The last executive order on assassinations, issued by President Reagan in 1981, stated: "No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States government shall engage in or conspire to engage in assassination [and] no agency of the intelligence community shall participate in or request any person to undertake activities forbidden by this order.")

- Wright also pointed out that the original ban on assassinations, issued by President Ford in 1976, resulted from Senate Select Committee on Intelligence findings that "U.S. officials had instigated plots in the 1960s against Fidel Castro in Cuba and Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, now Zaire." The Select Committee "also concluded that the United States had been involved in plots that resulted in the deaths of Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam in 1963 and Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina in the Dominican Republic in 1961."

Wright noted that the Pentagon ruling on assassinations came less than four months after the Department of Justice ruled that the FBI can "legally" apprehend fugitives in foreign

countries without first obtaining the consent of the countries whose sovereignty would be violated in the process.

Stripping the Webster proposal of history and immediate context, Engelberg and the *Times* fail to provide minimal information on the background and reason for the ban, the extensive involvement of the Bush administration in the development of the proposal, and some of the controversial issues raised by legalized assassination. Their report provides a vehicle for unconstrained news management by a highly unreliable source.

—Abid Aslam

## And Nelson Mandela Gets “Spun”

**N**elson Mandela's February 11 speech on his release from 27 years' imprisonment exceeded all expectation. It was resolute yet magnanimous. “Comrades and fellow South Africans,” he said, “I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy, and freedom for all. I stand here before you not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people.”

After paying tribute to all of his supporters over the years, he concluded, “I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunity. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But, if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Then, just as the speech ended, Dan Rather appeared, live, on CBS-TV. His opening words: “And thus Nelson Mandela concludes this address from the Mayor's balcony at the City Hall in Capetown. While loading praise on the Communist Party, Nelson Mandela has steadfastly said through the years that he is not a Marxist. But he has said that he appreciates the fact, as he sees it, that the Communist Party has long supported equality for blacks.”

Get the spin? “Communist,” “Marxist,” and “Communist”

in the first three sentences. The *Washington Post* followed the lead. David Ottaway's piece the next day stated, “The government called upon the anti-apartheid African National Congress to make some conciliatory gesture in response to those of President Frederik W. de Klerk and to reconsider its ‘discredited’ socialist policies....”

### Everyone Spins Along

The *New York Times* followed suit. Christopher Wren's February 15 article, “Some Find Mandela's Vision Limited,” was astonishingly slanted and insensitive. The title itself (three columns across) was foolish. It might as well have said, “Some Find World to be Flat.” It could, legitimately, perhaps, have been a tiny sidebar to a major article on how the vast majority of the people of the world find Mandela's vision awe-inspiring. Wren quoted several disappointed whites, including a rock-music disk jockey who told his listeners Mandela's speech “could have been written for him by Karl Marx.” He even managed to find “some blacks,” unnamed, who “confessed to being disappointed.”

Wren continued the *Times*'s tradition of remaining unabashedly kind to the government of South Africa. Mandela's release, he wrote on November 18, “was proof... that President F.W. de Klerk was serious about changing the universally despised system of apartheid.” In fact, Mandela's release should have been seen as proof of the validity of the ANC's policies and years of struggle. Wren's February 19 article, “In Pretoria, Last Throes of Marxism?” spoke of “the winds of change battering Marxism around the world have hit the South African Communist Party, which has endured by making itself synonymous in many blacks' minds with the struggle of the majority....”

Then the *New Yorker* magazine, usually considerably more liberal than the *Post* and the *Times*, spun along with the crowd. Its unsigned “Talk of the Town” column February 26, had this to say about Mandela: “He saluted the South African Communist Party, and he suggested that the country's major industries should be nationalized. He also vowed to continue the armed struggle against apartheid. In an era of peaceful revolutions, toppled and disgraced Communist parties, and the eclipse of planned economies, these were startling remarks. They raised

the possibility that Mr. Mandela might be unaware of all the ways the world has changed since 1964.”

The major media, it seems, have all decided that it is intolerably uppity for Nelson Mandela not to disavow armed struggle even though the government of South Africa has not disavowed segregation. And it is equally naive of him to believe that some socialism might benefit the black majority which has lived in near-slavery for 42 years.

Who, one might ask, is really unaware?

—William H. Schaap



Wide World Photos

Nelson Mandela, on the left, and Dan Rather, on the right.



# Colombian History Rewritten

Kristina Stockwood

**A** newspaper periodically prints information that contradicts what it has previously reported. An article entitled "For Colombians in Queens, Time of Pain and Questions" (*New York Times*, January 31, 1990, p. B1), by Tim Golden, describes reactions of some Colombians to the Avianca airplane crash on Long Island. Almost parenthetically, it includes a telling example of this kind of historical selectivity.

Golden refers to two incidents which occurred in 1985 in Bogotá: "In just the last five years they recall the 1985 volcanic eruption that buried more than 20,000 ... just weeks after leftist guerrillas killed 85 people, 11 of them Supreme Court justices, in an attack on the Palace of Justice in Bogotá." But in a front-page article at the time (*New York Times*, November 9, 1985), Joseph B. Treaster reported that it was President Belisario Betancur, eschewing negotiations, who had ordered an attack on the Palace where the M-19 rebels were holding hostages. Treaster wrote, "Survivors of the ordeal recalled in interviews desperately scrambling for cover among the bodies of those slain in the early shooting as soldiers and policemen launched a series of attacks with automatic weapons, 90-millimeter cannon mounted on armored cars, light antitank weapons and explosive charges." At least 35 of the dead were guerrillas, and all the rebels were said to have been killed. Many people also died in the aftermath when the army set the Palace on fire.

While Treaster had originally written that many deaths occurred when soldiers and police staged the "dramatic assault," his reports included accusations that the rebels had executed several of the justices pointblank. Furthermore, the headlines changed overnight from "Colombian Troops End Court Siege; Dozens are Slain" with a subhead of "Rebels Reported Killed" (*New York Times*, November 8, 1985, p. 1) to "Death Toll at 100 After Rebel Siege in Colombian City," with a subhead of "9 Judges Among Victims" (*New York Times*, November 9, 1985, p. 1).

Golden's version of history is the culmination of the U.S. government's dedication to blaming leftwing guerrillas for deaths which are actually perpetrated by the armies the U.S. supports (see Ingrid Arnesen and Carl Ginsburg, "Class and Cocaine in Colombia," *LOOT*, January 1990, p. 16).

President Reagan claimed in a December 14, 1985, address that the Nicaraguan government had supplied the rebels with the weapons that killed the justices. Both the Nicaraguan and the Colombian foreign ministers subsequently denied these allegations (*New York Times*, December 16, 1985, p. 3). In a February 12, 1987, speech to the American Bar Association designed to bolster support for *contra* aid, Secretary of State

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Kristina Stockwood, a graduate student in media studies at the New School for Social Research, is an intern at the Institute for Media Analysis.



Colombian army attacks Palace of Justice with armored cars and cannons, November 7, 1985.

George Shultz repeated these allegations, ignoring the denial of the Colombian government itself.

Last year, the Judge of the Colombian Criminal Justice Court responsible for investigating human rights violations charged the Colombian government with human rights violations stemming from the assault on the Palace of Justice. The Bogotá weekly *Semana* reported (April 11, 1989, p. 21) that the charges were due in part to the recently revealed findings of autopsies which concluded that the justices had all been killed by army weapons, and not by the guerrillas' bullets. Admittedly, the report comes long after the incident, but the *New York Times* never mentioned the new findings and continues to maintain M-19 culpability.

## ... the justices had all been killed by army weapons ...

On February 20, 1990, the Associated Press reported that the Colombian government had "pardoned 35 guerrillas who took part in the 1985 takeover of the Palace of Justice that killed 95 people.... It was the bloodiest rebel attack ever in Colombia." The report later states that the army attacked the Palace, and that those pardoned took part "in the planning or the assault." The report was mentioned in a similarly biased manner on a CNN radio broadcast that day but appears not to have been covered in the print media.

In a telephone interview soon after his January 31 article was printed, Golden said that it should have stated that the deaths were a result of the military's action but that the error must have been made "editorially." No correction has since been issued by the paper. Interestingly, he insisted that he had ultimate control over his copy, which was never changed without his approval.

The question remains, why was such an egregious error printed when the reporter himself denies responsibility? ●

## Down the Memory Hole

# History Confronts Journalism

*Editors' Note: The Czech author Milan Kundera has defined the present as a struggle of memory against forgetting. It is more than that; it is the question of which historical memory survives to give meaning and coherence to the present.*

*Lies Of Our Times analyzes the landscape of misinformation formed by the distorting lens of the contemporary press. We believe that historical misrepresentation is a major component of the world that the media daily constructs. Historians can play an important role in correcting this distorted record. To facilitate this, we plan a regular history column, Down the Memory Hole, of which this is the first, and we encourage the submission of articles for this column.*

In 1920, Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz critically examined the way the *New York Times* covered the revolutionary upheaval in Russia, its impact on World War I, and its attempted suppression by the allied military interventions. Analyzing the three years from March 1917 until March 1920 (some 1,000 issues with nearly 4,000 news items), the two journalists found the famous newspaper of record guilty of “systematically biased and incomplete reporting” revealed by a “pattern of misstatements and misinformation.” What concerned Lippmann and Merz was the impact of all this on the nation’s democratic process, as they assumed that only an informed public could formulate the judgments and provide the accountability and direction democratic systems of government demand and require.

Lippmann and Merz called their article in *The New Republic* (August 4, 1920) “A Test of the News,” and the authors correctly concluded that the *Times* had flunked the course. (See also Tom Goldstein, ed., *Killing the Messenger: 100 Years of Media Criticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1989], pp. 86-106.)

The key issues whose coverage Lippmann and Merz analyzed were: the war and the assessment of military capabilities; communism and the judgments of its nature and influence; and intervention, overt and covert, its causes and consequences. On all of these issues, the reports seriously misrepresented the ongoing reality, and readers who believed them would have had no reason to anticipate the outcomes which occurred.

“A Test of the News” should be, therefore, a primal paradigm, a cautionary parable to remind all media consumers that the product might be adulterated. The proofs that Lippmann and Merz discovered included both the unreliable and distorted accounts of events and of the processes and attitudes that brought them into being. In the first place, the *New York Times* regularly overestimated the military strength of the Russian

army and the willingness and ability of both the Kerensky and Soviet governments to keep fighting rather than make peace. In the second place, the reports consistently underestimated the strength of the Bolshevik forces and misunderstood their policies. Once the Soviets seized power, the analyses regularly evidenced optimism that the counterrevolutionary Whites could turn the tide. In other words, objectivity took second place to serving the military and ideological interests of the allies and misreading the revolutionary dynamics then unfolding in Russia.

Two other themes that sound equally contemporary also misrepresented reality. In the chaotic turmoil of those days, the *New York Times* seemed convinced that a strong man would emerge to restore an acceptable law and order regime. The first savior, Kerensky, was described as a “dictator ... who possesses all Peter the Great’s energy and twice his wisdom ... the national hero.” Later Kornilov became the savior-to-be, presented in headlines as a “great new power” backed by Cossacks, certain to lead the counterrevolution “to glory.” Meanwhile, the newspaper apparently could read the minds of millions of ordinary Russians when it asserted in one dispatch that “Kerensky’s [new Czardom] would give the imaginative peasants someone in whom to place that loyalty which they could never accord with the same enthusiasm to a blackcoated President.”

After the Soviet revolution of November 1917, the Red Peril syndrome came to dominate interpretations and to serve as rationale for the allied interventions. This included accounts of atrocities that had not occurred and predictions of a Soviet military invasion of Poland when Polish armed forces were, in fact, fighting inside Russia.

Beyond the mindsets of national interest and ideology, Lippmann and Merz found other contaminants in the news-gathering process. Among the most misleading ones, they identified: reliance on official sources, particularly the State Department and foreign embassies; the assumption that prestige assured authoritativeness and disdain for so-called “disreputable” sources (such as Soviets); the use of anonymous sources to verify facts and give them reliability; the intrusion of editorial biases into the news columns; the manipulation of headline captions; and

## One hundred times they predicted the imminent collapse of the Bolshevik government.

the prejudices, “credulity,” and “lack of common sense” of the correspondents themselves. All this may have been the reason why the *New York Times* in nearly 100 news items between 1917 and 1920 predicted the imminent collapse of the Bolshevik government.

Lippmann and Merz’s investigation has served as a model case history in schools of journalism ever since its publication. But its importance has a larger educational significance of a prophetic quality. Not only did it indicate the reportorial malfunctions of the day, but more importantly it forecast the potential for subversion of journalistic objectivity when the media are confronted by national security interests and the obsessions of the twentieth century state. ●



# Swindling the Homeless PR for the Government

Penny Mintz

It must have been embarrassing when word got out. Confidential memos from the commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA) and officials in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) showed that they deliberately ignored a congressional order to spend \$3.75 million on outreach programs. The money was earmarked for bringing homeless people into the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI).

The story only came to light when the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty discovered the memos and, on December 12, 1989, filed suit against HHS. The *Washington Post* ran a story the next day. The *National Law Journal* had a story on January 8, 1990. CBS-TV broadcast a feature on its January 24 Evening News.

But the *New York Times* never touched the story. Instead it published a puff piece for the government.

Somewhere between one and two million homeless people are mentally or physically disabled or elderly poor and therefore eligible for an average of \$440 a month in SSI. Unfortunately, SSI is grossly underdistributed to the homeless because most homeless people are unaware of their entitlement to money under the law. Those who know are often unable to fill out the complicated application forms.

That is why, on December 22, 1987, Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. It mandates "that the Department of Health and Human Services implement outreach services to the homeless." They earmarked an initial \$3.75 million for those services and, that done, went home to their Christmas dinners.

## Law Never Implemented

Now, more than two years later, it is reasonable to ask how these programs have fared. The answer is: poorly. The reason? The programs do not exist. The money was never spent, and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and others, sued the government on December 13, 1989, to force them to change. The next day, the *Washington Post* reported (p. A10) that "two states, a member of Congress and advocacy groups for the homeless, sued the government to force the Social Security Administration to implement a program to help homeless people obtain welfare and other benefits."

The *National Law Journal* story (p. 5) said, "An outreach program to distribute millions of dollars in federal funds to the homeless was a requirement passed by Congress at the end of 1987. But the law never was implemented, and federal offi-

cials spent early 1988 pondering how to avoid doing so, according to internal memos obtained by the public interest group."

Both stories were accurate. HHS and SSA did everything they could to keep outreach programs from being implemented. As a memo of March 15, 1988, from then Social Security Commissioner Dorcas Hardy shows, she saw two alternatives: ignore the law or repeal it. She preferred the latter. Her memo concluded, "Seek repeal of section 9117; pending outcome, do not seek appropriation."

HHS officials, however, decided that going for repeal "could unfortunately be interpreted as a lack of interest in the plight of the homeless ... subjecting the Secretary and the Administration to strong criticism ... in an election year" (memo from HHS Assistant Secretary Ronald Docksai, April 4, 1988).

"Since nothing is happening at the moment," wrote Assistant Secretary Steven Grossman in another memo the same day, "silence seems the best policy."

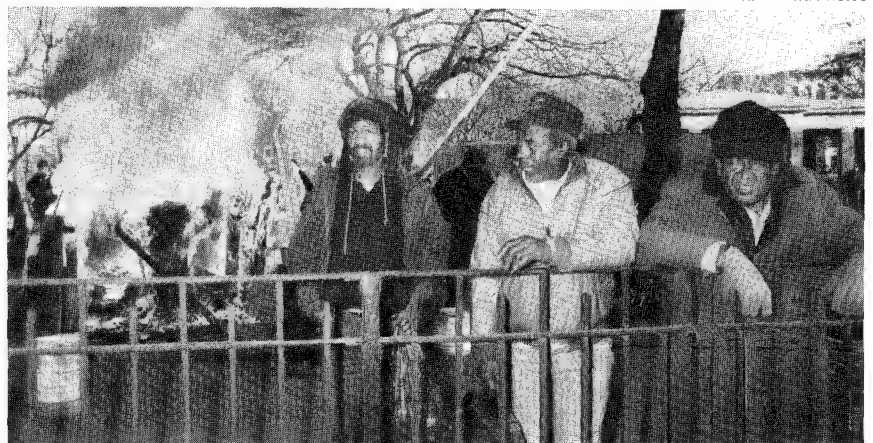
The memoranda and the lawsuit were featured on CBS-TV Evening News on January 24, 1990. Still not a word of these incriminating documents surfaced in the *New York Times*. That is because the *Times* had chosen a different course.

After the lawsuit became public information, the current Social Security commissioner, Gwendolyn S. King, put on a public relations performance. It is this story that the *Times* ran. The government was being sued for subverting outreach, but the *Times* headline, on December 29, 1989, read, "Social Security Chief Seeks to Expand a U.S. Welfare Program."

"I believe very strongly that we need to do more by way of outreach," the paper quoted Commissioner King. Her initiative, reporter Martin Tolchin wrote, "stands in sharp contrast to those in the Reagan administration, which made little effort to track down people eligible for the [SSI] program."

Exactly what efforts were made by Ms. King? Only one action was described: "Earlier this month [King] had sought to set an example by putting on blue jeans, a sweater and ski jacket and accompanying agency field workers as they approached homeless men and women in Baltimore."

One woman putting on jeans, a sweater, and a ski jacket is a public relations ploy, not an outreach initiative. ●



Homeless men set fire to their shelters in Tompkins Square Park, New York City, protesting police eviction.

Wide World Photos

# Tompkins Square Park

**T**he Coalition for the Homeless estimates that the homeless population of the United States grew by 20 percent in the past year, to around 3 million. Their increased visibility in "tent cities" is an affront to Katherine Bishop, who wrote in the *New York Times* on September 11, 1989 ("Tent Cities Becoming the Front Lines," p. A14), "These unsightly and often unsanitary settlements in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities are intensifying the debate over homelessness."

Bishop provided the groundwork for what would become, on the pages of the *Times*, a shift in public opinion toward the homeless, precariously based on the notion of aesthetic degradation. About three months later John Kifner completed the thought in his article, "Neighbors' Attitudes Shift as Park Declines" (December 7, 1989, pp. B1-2). Referring to the "tent city" in Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan, Kifner contended that the East Village's "long leftist tradition" of sympathy for the homeless was giving way to the need to reclaim the park.

Aside from citing the usual city officials, Kifner talked with Sam Turvey of the Tompkins Square Neighborhood Coalition. But Turvey's place in a story purporting to represent shifting attitudes is misleading. In a telephone interview for this article, Turvey faulted the press for creating more support in the papers than there was on the ground for the tent dwellers in the first place, by "getting its information from the pro-homeless political organizations, rather than from the people affected by the occupation of the park."

"I think the government is unwilling to come to terms with a difficult situation, leaving local people to grapple with it," Turvey continued. "they are squeamish about doing, or being seen to do, anything that looks like harming the homeless, who have a very well-organized, often violent political organization representing them. So we have organized ourselves to project our agenda."

Turvey's characterization of housing advocates as "pro-homeless" seems revealing. Also of note is the distinction he implies, between the homeless and "people," in the above statement to the *Times*. His arguments evince an entrenched frame of mind rather than what Kifner tries to portray as hailing from a "long leftist tradition" — sympathetic to the homeless and hostile to authority.

The unsubstantiated observations in Kifner's story serve to refocus the debate over homelessness from issues of poverty and housing policy to the unsightliness of the homeless.

— Brian Tenenbaum

## A Correction We'd Like to See

The *New York Times* regrets that since the purchase of the paper in 1896 by Adolph Ochs its editors have presented a distorted view of American and world history due to the fact that they are part of the ideological superstructure of U.S. and world capitalism.

They would hope to do better after the social revolution and beg their readers' indulgence until that time.

— Thanks to Tuli Kupferberg

# Lindsey Gruson on Guatemala: In the Great Tradition

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Edward S. Herman

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**I**n his article "Old Dictator Looks Better to Guatemala" (*New York Times*, September 3, 1989, p. A6), Lindsey Gruson writes within the *Times*'s tradition in handling Guatemalan affairs. In the process, he displays a wide range of forms of bias that have regularly characterized *Times* coverage.

The *Times* was an enthusiastic supporter of the U.S. subversion and overthrow of the elected government of Guatemala in 1954 (see Schlesinger and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982], Chapter 6); and, correspondingly, it treated in a low key the permanent state terrorism that ensued in the wake of that achievement. This includes the holocaust years of 1978-84, during which *Times* coverage was sparse, editorials rare and lacking in indignation, and numerous shattering human rights documents were ignored (see Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* [New York: Pantheon, 1988], pp. 72-79). The Guatemala elections of 1984-85, openly an "army project" to obtain international legitimacy, were taken at face value by the *Times*, and yielded the desired designation of "democracy" with an "elected government" (in contrast with Nicaragua), although there was clear evidence, including admissions by President Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, and constitutional protections of army rights, that civilian rule was nominal. Stephen Kinzer, however, devoted an article to explaining how Nicaraguan dissidents were hoping that the Guatemalan example of eliminating army rule would spread to Nicaragua ("Guatemalan Vote Heartens Nicaragua Parties," *New York Times*, December 27, 1985, p. A12).

Gruson's article fits perfectly into this tradition. Although it is one of the lesser defects in his piece, he even tells a literal lie, which characteristically underplays Guatemalan state terrorism. Noting the recent murder of Danilo Barillas, a left-leaning member of the Christian Democratic Party and a friend of Cerezo, Gruson says: "Mainstream politicians, who have traditionally been spared the brunt of the political violence, have apparently become targets."

## Leaders Assassinated

If Gruson had looked into the files of his own paper, he would have discovered an article by Warren Hoge on May 3, 1981, "Repression Increases in Guatemala as U.S. Tries to Improve Relations," in which it is noted, rather matter-of-factly, that "Se-

New York Times



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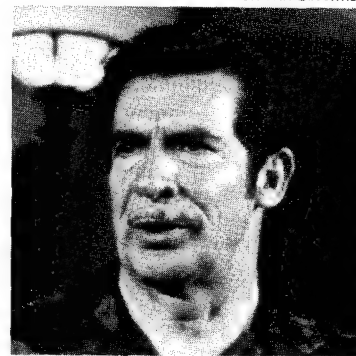
venty-six leaders of the Guatemalan Christian Democratic Party, which is associated with the Christian Democratic Party of President José Napoleón Duarte in El Salvador, have been slain in the last 10 months. Ten officials of the left-of-center Social Democratic United Revolutionary Front have been killed." These startling numbers were presented in 1981 as passing comment, on page 2; the underlying events had not been mentioned before in the *Times*, they elicited no editorial comment, and they quickly passed into oblivion. For Gruson, they never occurred.

Gruson's article is also grounded in the supposition that the election of 1985 really did end army rule and establish a true democracy. His first sentence is: "When a civilian government took office here in 1986 after three decades of almost uninterrupted military rule, it appeared to close a bloody chapter in Guatemala's history." Gruson repeatedly cites the "frustration with civilian government" and the claim that "Guatemalans are increasingly questioning the superiority of democracy." In essence, Gruson takes the intended appearance in the army's project as the reality, despite massive evidence to the contrary. His basic assumption is that civilian rule and "democracy" were tried and failed.

An alternative view would be that the army and oligarchy

never surrendered power, which explains why essential structural reform was not attempted by Cerezo, and why he did not end the "civil defense patrols" and other elements of the counterinsurgency state. Gruson does say that "the disparity between the region's rich and poor, which has given rise to leftist insurgencies," has actually increased in spite of Cerezo's populist pretensions. But Gruson never hints at the possibility that these disparities might have increased because "civilian government" was a mere facade, that they resulted from the *absence* of democracy and the lack of any representation and power for the largely rural population which was still severely repressed. Gruson does not mention the invasion of 1954 and the U.S. support for army-oligarchic rule as factors explaining the growing "disparities" and the failure of the "democracy."

Kenneth Silverman



Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt.

## Early Gruson

**E**arly in his career as a reporter in Central America, Lindsey Gruson showed that his approach fit well the policy of the A.M. Rosenthal era. In an article from San Salvador, entitled "Firebrands, They're in a Class by Themselves" (September 15, 1987), Gruson focused on the radicalization of the University of El Salvador and elsewhere in Central American universities. The key sentences in the article that display Gruson's and the *Times*'s fundamental bias, read: "The military's tolerance snapped in 1980. It stormed the central campus and shut it for four years." A few paragraphs later, after a further account of radicalization, Gruson says: "That has apparently prompted reprisals. Salvadore Ubau, president of the Committee of University Workers, disappeared this month...."

Notice how the disappearance is explained as a "reprisal" to the radicalization. The army's attack on the university is also portrayed as responsive and defensive, its patience running out. No background is given of army mass murder in 1980 that might have contributed to the radicalization and put the stress on army terror as primary and causal. If *Pravda* in 1980 had described a crackdown on a Czech university in terms of "the military's tolerance [having] snapped," it would be obvious that this was an apologetic frame, which took conditions in Czechoslovakia as given and reasonable, and made a crackdown the understandable behavior of an impatient parent. The point applies equally to the Gruson-*Times* apologia for the Salvadoran army.

## Who Are the Spokespeople?

Who says that the "old dictator," born-again evangelical, Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, looks better to "Guatemala"? In the *Times* tradition, Gruson does not report a single opinion of a peasant, or anybody in the countryside. He quotes an "owner of a men's clothing store" and another store owner who is a friend of the general. The first owner says, "When the general was in charge, at least a working man had a chance." The second claims that the general may have violated human rights, but "only in an effort to protect the rights of working people." Store owners are the exclusive spokesmen for "working people." No union official or worker is cited, nor any human rights reports or other evidence on the murder of union leaders, workers, and the decline of unionism under the generals.

Gruson also refers to "several polls" showing Ríos Montt leading "in the capital" and second in the country as a whole. These polls and their sources are not identified. He also quotes a "western diplomat" on the Guatemalan people's loss of faith in "elected governments" to solve "the problems they were elected to solve." This diplomat naturally does not explain why "elected governments" in Guatemala can't solve problems, and

## Reader Advisory:

**T**he assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Romero on March 24, 1980, will be commemorated with marches to end the U.S. war in Central America in various cities on Saturday, March 24, 1990. Readers are advised to watch the press coverage of these events. The Washington, D.C., march will begin at the U.S. Capitol and end at a rally in front of the White House. Other events have been organized in Austin, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

## Numbers Don't Lie

### Talk About Understatement



On October 13, 1989, the *New York Times* ran this photo of a march in San Salvador, over this caption: "In Salvador, Indians Declare Columbus Day a Day of Mourning."

The article, in the form of a sub-caption, read in its entirety as follows:

"More than 400 members of the National Association of Indigenous Salvadorans marched through San Salvador and past the statue of Christopher Columbus yesterday to protest the negative effects of Columbus's arrival. They declared a day of mourning for the thousands of Indians killed by whites."

The sub-caption discloses a characteristically subtle maneuver of the *Times*: to reveal something while weakening it by understatement. It is technically correct that "thousands" of Indians have been killed by whites, but it is also true that *millions* of Indians were killed by whites, many tribes literally exterminated in genocidal operations

(See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* [New York: Harper & Row, 1980], p. 16. And see Penny Mintz, "Some Anti Pro-Choice Choices," *LOOT*, January 1990, p. 9. She notes that a photo of some 300,000 pro-choice protesters was captioned in the *Times* with the phrase "Thousands gathered near the Lincoln Memorial...." The photo showed only a handful of the protestors.)

—Joel Kovel

### Military Budget: Two Views

It all depends on how you look at it. Two headlines on a news conference held by Defense Secretary Cheney on spending plans for the next five years demonstrate the possibilities:

"Pentagon Plans \$21 Billion Budget Increase Through '95" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 12, 1990, p. 14A).

"Pentagon Plans \$2.3 Billion Saving in '91 by Cutting 16,000 Jobs" (*New York Times*, January 12, 1990, p. A17).

The *Times* article is largely devoted to Mr. Cheney's statements on how money will be saved through more efficient management and personnel reductions, with some reference to earlier reports that criticized existing practices. The *Inquirer* article mentions Cheney's proposed reforms and personnel reductions, but pays primary attention to the fact that the proposed \$250 billion budget for next year is \$4 billion higher than this year's, and that increases are projected each year to 1995, when the budget would be \$312 billion. It also quotes two congressional critics of the proposal, Sen. Jim Sasser (Dem.-Tex.), Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, saying "Those guys really love their weapons," among other things, and Rep. Patricia Schroeder (Dem.-Colo.), a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, terming the budget proposal "irresponsible," and suggesting that with a continuation of *perestroika*, "defense spending should shrink back toward its post-World War II historic level of \$225 billion."

—Mary W. Herman

### Read the Whole Paper

On November 17, 1989, the *Times* ran an Op-Ed piece by Barry M. Blechman, stating that overwhelming evidence confirms that Soviet military spending will have declined in 1989 "to between 14 and 16 percent of gross national product, down from 15 to 17 percent in 1988."

The same day's paper ran a piece in the Business Section, Leonard Silk's column, "Economic Scene," which pointed out that the estimates of Soviet military spending coming from the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency—some 16 percent of GNP—were determined in a new study to be overstated "by some 50 percent." The study explained that the CIA had admitted in 1984 that its annual growth figures were overstated, but that it had nevertheless failed to adjust the figures thereafter. The 1988 figure should have been 9 percent, and the 1989 figure 8 percent. But, the article noted, "the analysts are still using the CIA-DIA figures as their base." And the Op-Ed writers, it seems.

### Full Employment?

A *LOOT* reader, David Crowley, gave us a copy of a letter he had sent to *U.S. News & World Report*, complaining about a phrase in Sylvia Nasar's November 27, 1989, column, "Economic Outlook." She had written the following: "Two years of full employment have not led to widespread labor shortages and outsize wage hikes." As Mr. Crowley explained in his letter—which *U.S. News* did not publish—a glance at the Almanac shows that 1988 unemployment was 5.5 percent, or 6.7 million people; the 1989 figures were projected to be 5.2 percent, or 6.5 million people. The figures, he noted, are conservative, since they only include those eligible for unemployment insurance, and do not include those working as little as ten hours a week. "No wonder," he ended his letter, "I have had such a hard time finding a job these past six months; Ms. Nasar says I'm already fully employed."



# Body Count in Romania

## The Shifting Story

Joyce Chediak

In the last half of December, 1989—as war raged in Panama—banner headlines and TV broadcasts carried extensive coverage of massacres in Romania. First it was reported that 4,500 Romanian civilians were murdered in Timisoara on December 17 by members of the *Securitate* acting on orders of Nicolae Ceausescu. As the days passed, the figures grew. The 4,500 dead jumped to about 60,000 killed between December 17 and December 26. Photos of exhumed bodies were shown while reporters described hundreds buried in mass graves. We were told that a spontaneous uprising of the horrified Romanian population finally resulted in the overthrow and execution of Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, also a government official.

By December 31, the banner headlines were gone. Articles on the inside pages reported a shrinking number of victims and a different story of the origins of the uprising.

The *Washington Post* of December 31 referred to the “so called” massacre in Timisoara. A story in the December 31 *Boston Globe*, entitled “Facts Are Hard to Find in Romania,” said that reporters visiting the supposed site of a mass grave in Timisoara “discovered only a crude potter’s field with about two dozen exposed bodies.” The paper noted that “a massacre of the magnitude claimed by the anti-Ceausescu forces should have swamped medical facilities in the region,” but medical personnel at one of the Timisoara hospitals said no casualties were brought to their facilities on the days of the alleged massacre.

A story in the February 6, 1990, *Village Voice* quotes Dr. Ferenc Baranyi, a staff surgeon at the municipal hospital of Timisoara, saying the exhumed bodies shown in the western press were “all false. ... I know personally of at least 40 bodies that were stolen from the morgue.” Indeed photos of the bodies in the “mass graves” clearly showed autopsy scars.

### Revised Casualty Figures

How many really died in Romania? On January 28, in an article from Bucharest, the *New York Times* said, “Today, for the first time, the special military tribunal set the number of known dead at 689, a far cry from the 60,000 figure used in the indictment against the Ceausescus.” A February 8 Reuters dispatch printed the following day in the *Times* added that “A [Romanian] government report said today that just 71 people died in Timisoara, where the December uprising against President Nicolae Ceausescu began, in contrast to initial estimates that put the number in the thousands.” No one has yet reported how many of those killed were members of the army or the security forces who fought each other in a civil war from December 17 to 26.

How did the figure of 4,500 originate? The January 1, 1990, *Time* magazine story, “Slaughter in the Streets” (pp. 34-37), at-

tributed it to “eyewitnesses who spoke by telephone with Vladimir Tismaneanu, Romanian specialist at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.” And finally, on February 9, 1990 the *New York Times* (p. A11) quoted an official, Dr. Traian Crisan: “It was hysteria explainable under the conditions of the revolution. You had mass panic and a state of stress. It was a sort of madness that was going on.” Christopher Hitchens of *The Nation*, in Timisoara, was also a victim of this hysteria. The column he wrote on his visit there (January 22, 1990, p. 78) was exceptionally lurid: “The people of this city ... were executed in heaps .... They were dumped in mass graves in the forest.... Some of them were raped and mutilated like the villagers of My Lai.” The floor of a hospital basement was “tacky ... with fairly fresh blood.”

There are other possible explanations for the reportage: Western sources could have concocted inflated numbers and encouraged their use to discomfit an enemy and to arouse Romanian fury, giving the rebellion further impetus. The *Los Angeles Times* on December 29 quoted Roxanna Boban, a Bucharest physician who supported the overthrow of Ceausescu. “Radio Free Europe and also the Voice of America and the BBC—these were very important to us,” she said. “Everyone in the country knew about Timisoara from the radio.... The radio told us what was going on. We could learn nothing from our own radio or television. This was very important, and no one ever mentions it.”

### Planned Elements to “Spontaneous” Uprising

Not only the numbers of those killed by Ceausescu’s forces, but also the spontaneous character of the uprising, are proving questionable. The January 3 issue of the *New York Times* reported, in a back-page story, that “people at the very center of the revolution were debating whether their efforts were fully spontaneous or whether the spark of protest had been fanned by a small conspiratorial group that first coalesced as long as six months ago.” The *Times* then described an “amateur video, taken just as power was changing hands” showing General Militaru, a retired officer who was—until his forced resignation on February 16—Romania’s new defense minister, “saying that the ruling Council of National Salvation had been in existence for six months.”

### Body Counts: Exaggerated in Romania, Elusive in Panama

Underscoring the cynicism and brutality of the Panama invasion, even remotely accurate figures for civilian casualties or “collateral damages,” as the Pentagon terms them, were for the most part absent from the media, and still are. A comparison of *Times* and other citations is revealing:

The *Times*: “Several hundred civilians are thought to have been killed” (December 31, 1989), and, “220 civilian deaths,” according to a Pentagon estimate (January 24, 1990). The Southern Command estimate was 202.

But the Panamanian National Human Rights Commission puts the figure at 4,000 civilians dead, and the Panamanian Episcopal Commission says that “at least 3,000” civilians were killed.

Joyce Chediak is a managing editor of *Workers World* newspaper.

## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: How It Works

**E**ven major stories can pass without comment. During the 1980s, for example, the Republicans have been the party of radical Keynesianism. They have pumped up the economy by pouring federal funds—borrowed—into military development and high-tech research. The Democrats, on the other hand, have tried to control the deficit and trade imbalance and to restrain some of the spending. For ten years they generally have been our fiscal conservatives.

Yet, the fact that our two dominant parties have flipped 180 degrees on a major issue, inexplicably causes not a ripple of interest in the *New York Times*.

### The Good

Another recent example of peculiar economic coverage involves the nation's savings and loan associations (S&Ls). The 1980s presented some golden opportunities to the newly freed S&Ls. They had been regulated and protected by the U.S. government—through advantages in interest rates compared to commercial banks, guarantees, etc.—in exchange for the major service they provided: making it possible for American families to purchase a house by issuing home mortgages. Then the Reagan administration told them they could keep the benefits, but forget the responsibilities.

S&L owners could now take virtually any risk they wanted with depositors' money. If it worked out, the bank's executives were rich; if not, the government would print more dollars to pay back the depositors.

### The Bad

Some S&L owners were averse to market risk. They decided that rather than take chances with their depositors' money, they would just give it directly to their family and friends. To cover up their misdeeds, these S&Ls would make the gifts in the form of loans on worthless oil wells, etc. This is the fraud that has generated headlines. The taxpayers' cost is in the billions.

### The Ugly

A few lucky S&L owners did not have to worry about either market risk or pesky prosecutors. These fellows knew that national security precluded investigations. They worked for the CIA in exchange for freedom to manipulate their accounts.

You would think that CIA employees being caught with their hands in the till at S&Ls would be worth a few thousand words, at least, in Washington or New York.

—Daniel Mintz

## S&L: Savings and Laundering?

**O**n February 4 Pete Brewton of the *Houston Post* broke an astounding story which had been percolating in Texas for many months (p. A1). It was becoming abundantly clear that a large number of savings and loan associations—many of them based in Texas—which were rapidly going bankrupt, were not merely badly or fraudulently managed. They had been deeply involved with organized crime, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Nicaraguan *contras*, money laundering, and drug and weapons trafficking.

While the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have contented themselves with articles about the pluses and minuses of the multi-billion dollar federal bailouts, the wire services and many newspapers around the country have given their readers the unfolding drama.

Brewton's story—with the *Houston Post's* continuing added details—was carried by Reuters on February 4, by the Associated Press on February 6 and 8, and by United Press International on February 17. It was in *Newsday*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Times* on February 7. As *LOOT* goes to press, it has still not been covered in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*.

Why? While these two papers have been devoting page after page to real and perceived corruption in the socialist world, one of the biggest scandals in America continues to brew. Houston court documents indicate that senior officials of many of the failed S&Ls were laundering money for both the CIA and the Mafia. They were transporting vast sums of cash for the CIA, running guns, smuggling drugs, and transferring funds secretly to the *contras*.

### The Incredible Details

A follow-up story by Juan R. Palomo in the February 6 *Houston Post* (p. A1) indicated CIA and organized crime links "in the failure of at least 22 S&Ls." The article carried a brief denial from the CIA: "The CIA does not violate U.S. laws and would not participate in fraudulent activities." But, as a former federal prosecutor quoted by Brewton in his first article observed, "How do you expect the government to investigate itself?" On February 8, Brewton disclosed (p. A1) that various related federal investigations had been thwarted because of CIA claims of national security. These probes suggested links to CIA proprietaries, major Mafia families, anti-Castro Cubans and Bay of Pigs veterans, Adnan Khashoggi, Colombian drug kingpins, Sgt. Samuel Doe of Liberia, the Iran/*contra* players, and a number of known former CIA officers. It is hard to believe that the two most influential newspapers in America saw nothing fit to print.

Last summer, President Bush signed a \$150 billion bailout of the S&Ls. Could this former Director of the CIA be trying to protect his spy organization? And are the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* complicit?

—Ellen Ray

# Nostalgia for Go-Go and Junk Bonds

**T**he Reaganite and free-market Chicago School view of takeovers is that they are socially beneficial because they keep managers on their toes and redeploy assets from poorly managed firms to the better managed firms which acquire them. The issue has come into renewed prominence with controversy over proposed state legislation that would impede greenmail and hostile takeovers (e.g., currently in Pennsylvania), the failure of the Campeau retail department store empire, and the collapse of Drexel Burnham Lambert and the junk bond market.

In recent editorials and news articles the *Times* has lined up with the Reaganite unconstrained free market school. In the "Editorial Notebook" article "Junk Bonds, Consenting Adults" (February 15, 1990), Michael Weinstein states that hostile takeovers serve to "keep big-time corporate managers on their toes." Several days later, in an article "Life in the Executive Suite after Drexel" (February 18, 1990), Sarah Bartlett says that "many see the firm's disappearance as another sign that the pressures that *have kept American business on its toes* in the 1980s are on the wane... further damaging its global competitive position" (emphasis added).

"On its toes" is a question-begging euphemism. The implication, explicit in Chicago School accounts, is that under the pressure of a hostile takeover threat, managers focus more on efficiency and productivity. But this suggests four questions that Weinstein and Bartlett never address. One is: Did U.S. cor-

## Did corporate productivity improve in the 1980s with hostile takeovers?

porate efficiency and productivity improve with the growth of hostile corporate takeovers in the 1970s and 1980s? Bartlett implies that they did, but provides no evidence. And the evidence is not there. Productivity growth declined in the 1970s as hostile takeovers gathered steam, recovered slightly in the early 1980s, and then stabilized at a level below past historical peaks.

A second question is: Have mergers in the recent past been successful in improving the efficiency of the acquired firms? Recent studies have shown that acquired firms tend to perform no better or slightly less well than their peers, and that more than half of the acquisitions are eventually sold off.

A third question is: Can firms effectively insulate themselves from hostile takeovers by becoming well managed? Only to a small degree. The evidence is strong that from the 1960s to the present, many acquiring firms deliberately sought out well-managed firms, not "dogs" needing managerial overhaul, and in many cases the acquired firms had performed better than their buyers. In the 1980s, with the maturing of the takeover market, and the growth of fee-driven investment banks devoted to takeovers, their connection with potential productivity en-

hancement became quite remote.

A fourth question is: Is improved productivity the only route a management can take to escape a hostile takeover? The answer is a resounding negative. Firms can insulate themselves by putting in staggered director terms, requiring eighty percent votes for merger approval, and using so-called "poison pills"; by making themselves less attractive by acquiring other firms themselves and incurring painfully heavy debts; and by beefing up their short-term profits through cut-backs in investment, R&D expenditures, staff and planning; and by more ruthless treatment of labor and local communities. Many economists and business leaders have contrasted the short-term perspective of U.S. corporate business with the longer view of the Japanese and West Germans, attributing the difference in part to institutional factors such as the takeover threat and the short time horizon of U.S. institutional investors like pension funds and banks.

The institutional investors, who provided a large part of the money for junk bonds, are the primary source of information for Sarah Bartlett and for her contention that the economy will suffer because of the breakup of the Drexel/junk bond/hostile takeover machinery for "keeping management on its toes."

— Edward S. Herman

## Disinformation on Albania

Editors' Note: *The following are excerpts from a letter to the Editor of the New York Times which was not published.*

January 30, 1990

To the Editor:

Your editorial, "The Last Domino" (January 26, 1990) viciously attacking Albania, comes as a shock to many of your readers who have regarded the *Times* as a fair, impartial journal that reports the facts as correctly as possible.

As one of a considerable number of Americans who have visited Albania over the years, I find it hard to enumerate all the inaccuracies, distortions, outright falsehoods, and slanders contained in your editorial, in a short letter. Your editorial consists of twenty sentences, in which I can count at least twenty-five "errors" (to put it mildly). This editorial should go into the *Guinness Book of Records* for having the greatest number of inaccuracies in the shortest space.

Let us take up one of the "errors." You say that, "refugees tell horrifying stories of savage repression, credible enough to justify the inquiry now underway by the U.N. Human Rights Commission." A simple telephone call to the U.N. will establish the following facts: the U.N. is not now, nor has it ever in the past, conducted an investigation into human rights abuses in Albania. The Commission is meeting now (as of January 29, 1990) in Geneva, with a long agenda of reports to discuss—none of which concerns Albania. For an investigation into human rights abuses to be instituted by the U.N., a resolution calling for such an investigation must be passed by the Commission. Nothing of the kind has ever occurred pertaining to Albania.

It is hard to imagine that the *New York Times*, which has correspondents and specialists all over the U.N. and Geneva, and exhaustive computer files at its fingertips, does not know this. One can only conclude that the purpose of this editorial is not to spread the truth, but to contribute to a widespread unscrupulous campaign to attack little Albania, overthrow the socialist regime there, and replace it with western style "democracy" as in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, etc.

Jack Shulman  
Editor  
*Albania Report*



# Translation Problems?

Dearborn, Michigan

January 21, 1990

Wide World Photos



To the Editor of the *New York Times*:

Today's edition of the *New York Times* carries an erroneous translation of the Arabic text that appears in the photo on page six. The photo depicts a demonstration of Lebanese journalists "protesting attempts by Gen. Michel Aoun, leader of the Christian militia to censor news reports." The translation of the demonstrators' sign in the caption below reads, "In Allah's hands we are safe." The actual Arabic text is something entirely different. Translated into English, it says, "Freedom of the Press / Yes to the [printed] word, No to Terror."

Mistakes do happen, of course. I would venture to speculate, however, that the erroneous translation slipped by because it was congenial to Western notions of the Arabs as fatalistic. I doubt very much that a news photo bearing a similar translated message, but ascribed to a group of demonstrating Israeli journalists, would have slipped past your news editors. It surely would have been sent back for double checking, since such a fatalistic message would not have "fit" preconceived notions of Israeli journalists. Thus, "the news that's fit to print" also fits our cultural and political notions.

Sincerely,

Nabeel Abraham

*Editor's Note: The above photo prompted Professor Nabeel Abraham to send the letter which follows. It was not published, nor was a correction printed by the Times. The photo as released by the Associated Press, and obtained by LOOT for reproduction above, does not contain in its caption a translation of the sign.*

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# Who Killed Martin Luther King, Jr. ?

**John Sergeant**

*Editors' Note: "Who Killed Martin Luther King?" a documentary produced by John Edginton was commissioned by the BBC in September 1989. John Sergeant was assistant producer. The substance of this startling film has never been discussed in the U.S. media. Indeed, neither PBS nor any of the networks would air it in this country. On March 18, 1990, the film will be shown on the Arts & Entertainment cable stations. A lengthy piece on the findings of the filmmakers will appear in the Spring 1990 issue of Covert-Action Information Bulletin.*

In July 1979 the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded in its final report that the murder of President John F. Kennedy was probably the result of a conspiracy. The Committee also concluded that Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed by James Earl Ray, but that a conspiracy of rightwing businessmen from St. Louis was probably behind it. Although the scenario behind the death of John F. Kennedy has been challenged frequently since the Committee issued its report, for some reason this has not been the case with Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Committee severely criticized the FBI for its dirty tricks campaign against King, but exonerated all local, state, and federal agencies from involvement in the killing itself. With that the matter rested, and in 1983 the Justice Department quietly closed the case.

Quite why the U.S. media did not rigorously scrutinize the

findings of the Committee regarding the King assassination did not become clear to us even as we researched Dr. King's death.

At street level, African-Americans told us from the beginning that the government had assassinated Martin Luther King, but almost everyone agreed we could never get to the bottom of it. As we learned, for example, how documents and evidence could be forged by official agencies we were tempted to agree. But in seeking out surviving witnesses and experts on the case — many of whom had never been interviewed by the authorities or the media — it became very clear that there still remained gaping holes in the official story — individuals, issues, places, that have not been, should be, and still could be, properly investigated.

In the end our film poses a simple question:

How does the U.S. government explain the apparent involvement of one of its agents in the provision of Ray's aliases before, and immediately after, the assassination?

If the answer is that this cannot be explained away, then we must consider the probability that agents of the government really were involved, and that one of the greatest coverups ever perpetrated has been mounted against the U.S. public and the world beyond.

We believe the truth, elusive as it is, still lies out there awaiting the right triangulations of diverse personal memories. ●



Wide World Photos



As Dr. King's body lies at their feet, his aides point in the direction of the sound of the shot immediately after it was fired.

Wide World Photos

## Lies Of Our Times

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